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Waldheim's U.N. File

Was he compromised?

Could Kurt Waldheim really have kept a Nazi past secret for 40 years? If some people knew, could they have blackmailed him? Information about Waldheim's military career has lain in the United Nation's own archives for four decades—but until last week, no member government had ever asked for the records to be brought to light. Either no one ever knew about his past, one investigator said, or "Waldheim was compromised by every intelligence agency on the planet."

"Why hasn't the United States asked to see the [Waldheim] files?" asked a high-ranking U.N. official. "Why didn't the Soviet Union and the United States, who had veto power over Waldheim's appointment, look into this? Once he was in, did the Soviets and the Americans know and use it against him?"

It is becoming harder to believe that no one knew. In 1980 Rep. Stephen Solarz queried the Central Intelligence Agency about war-crimes charges against Waldheim. The CIA pooh-poohed them. But for a month now, details about Waldheim's past have been dribbling out from archives around the world. Then World Jewish Congress investigators

found a reference to Waldheim's U.N. file, No. 79/724.

Investigators claim the U.S. Justice Department had made repeated requests to see the U.N. files in 1984. "The Justice Department has been searching archives all over the world—and gotten full cooperation," said Neal Sher, director of the Office of Special Investigations. In 1980 U.N. officials OK'd the search, but Waldheim reportedly vetoed it as a fishing expedition.

Under pressure to settle the controversy, the United Nations last week granted the Israeli government's request to have a look at Waldheim's file. When it is opened, possibly this week, said Israeli U.N. Ambassador Benjamin Netanyahu, it should "clear the air once and for all."

It may poison it instead. Among the documents investigators hope to find is a response to a 1947 complaint from the

Yugoslavs demanding Waldheim's extradition to stand trial for "murder, slaughter, shooting of hostages." The complaint quotes Egbert Hilcer, a reputed war criminal, as saying that Waldheim ordered a reprisal against Yugoslav partisans in October 1944, "when 114 people[were] killed." Waldheim, now running for president of Austria, has denied all such allegations. A U.N. source who worked closely with him dismissed the suggestion that Waldheim might have been compromised: "If there were pressure being brought on him there's no way we wouldn't have known about it." But until the archives are fully aired, doubts are not likely to go away.

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